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SÖREN KIERKEGAARD

I

The outer aspects of Kierkegaard's career suggest the placid and uneventful life of a student and man of letters. Born in Copenhagen on the 5th of May, 1813, the youngest son of a merchant of means, he received the humanistic discipline of a classical school, and was enrolled in the University at the age of eighteen. The ten years following were spent in somewhat discursive studies, ranging over the fields of esthetics, philosophy, and theology. At twenty-seven he received the degree of *Magister artium*, and soon thereafter entered into an engagement of marriage, broken after a year upon his own initiative. He remained unmarried, and from this time until his death, which took place on the 11th of November, 1855, he devoted himself unremittingly to his literary labors, unfolding an extraordinary productivity.

Kierkegaard was endowed with a sensitive organism, and under the calm surface of his outward life there stirred a tense spiritual vitality. The trait which Wordsworth eulogizes as a mark of spiritual elevation, "the capacity to be excited to significant feeling without the application of gross or violent stimulants," was his in an extraordinary degree. Events which in the lives of most men would have passed without creating a ripple upon the surface, stirred his soul to its depths; and hence the apparent exaggeration which so many of his critics have found in his interpretation of himself and his experiences. The man of genius is naturally characterized by freshness and fulness of feeling, and Kierkegaard's personal experiences were certainly deeply felt; so profoundly, indeed, that they served to stimulate in him a reflection of universal significance.

II

Both parents were of peasant stock. The father, Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard, came to Copenhagen as a boy of twelve, and was apprenticed to an uncle engaged in trade. He even-

tually set up for himself, achieved success and retired at forty with a competence regarded as considerable for the times. This retirement from business synchronized with his second marriage, a year after the death of his first wife. Of the seven children of this second marriage, Sören Aabye was the youngest. Thus the father was already fifty-seven years old at the time of Sören's birth, while his mother was forty-five.

Sören's mother had been her husband's housekeeper. Of a cheerful and domestic disposition, she seems to have been but little capable of entering into the intellectual life of her two gifted sons, and appears to have exerted a minimum of influence upon Kierkegaard's development. His journals maintain silence with regard to her.

The father was a dominant figure, austere and precise. A deep strain of melancholy in his disposition, nurtured by unhappy and disquieting memories, tended in its turn to keep these memories alive. From this melancholy he sought relief in a pietistic religiosity, and to some extent, it appears, in philosophical reading. To him Kierkegaard attributes the deepest formative influences of his life. A merchant who retires at forty from a successful business career in order to have leisure to repent his sins, read Wolffian metaphysics, and bring up his children in the fear of God, cannot be set down as an ordinary or commonplace character; and it is not surprising that his influence upon the son should have been profound.

The melancholy which was the common heritage of father and son can be described by citing a single characteristic trait. One day while herding sheep on the bare Jutland heath, embittered by his privations and oppressed by loneliness, the elder Kierkegaard, who was then a boy of eleven or twelve, had mounted a hill and assailed with curses the God who had condemned him to so wretched an existence. In Kierkegaard's journal for the year 1846 there is a reference to this incident in the following terms: "The terrible fate of the man who had once in childhood mounted a hill and cursed God, because he was hungry and cold, and had to endure privations while herding his sheep—and who was unable to forget it even at the age of eighty-two." When after Kierkegaard's death this

passage was shown to his surviving elder brother, Bishop Peder Christian Kierkegaard, he burst into tears and said: "That is just the story of our father, and of his sons as well." Elsewhere, in *Stages on the Way of Life*, Kierkegaard suggests that these dark moods served to link the father and the son in a fellowship of secret and unexpressed sympathy.

"There once lived a father and a son. A son is a mirror in which the father sees himself reflected, and the father is a mirror in which the son sees himself as he will be in the future. But these two did not often look at one another in this manner, for their daily intercourse was carried on through the medium of a gay and lively conversation. But sometimes it happened that the father would pause and turn with sad face toward the son, saying as he gazed into his eyes: 'Poor boy, you are the victim of a silent despair.' This was all that ever passed between them; no explanation of the meaning of these words was ever vouchsafed, nor any discussion of how far they might possibly be true. The father thought that he was responsible for the boy's melancholy, and the son thought that it was he who caused his father so much grief—but not a word was ever exchanged between them on the subject."

There are two other phases of Kierkegaard's boyhood, and of his father's influence upon the development of his mind, which I shall allow him to describe in his own words, quoting the sketch given of Johannes Climacus, the principal character in *De omnibus dubitandum est*, an unfinished metaphysical essay, written by Kierkegaard in 1842-3, and undoubtedly autobiographical in character.

"His home-life offered but few diversions. He was scarcely ever permitted to go out, and thus he became accustomed, at an early age, to attend to himself and to his own thoughts. His father was very strict, and dry and prosaic on the surface; but underneath this coarse and unpretentious exterior he preserved a glowing fancy, which not even his extreme old age was able to dull. When Johannes sometimes asked for permission to go out, he was most often refused; but occasionally, as if to make up for this refusal, the father proposed a walk together up and down the room. This seemed at first a poor substitute; and yet, like his father's coarse gray coat, it concealed under its plain exterior something very different from that which appeared on the surface. The proposal accepted, it was for Johannes himself to decide where to go. They passed out the gate and visited a neighboring palace; or went to the seashore, or wandered about the streets, all at the boy's pleasure. For the father's imagination was powerful enough to create a realizing sense of anything and everything the boy desired. While they walked up and down, the father described the sights along the way; they greeted the passers-by; the vehicles rumbled and drowned the father's voice; the dainties displayed by the fruit-woman on the corner

seemed more alluring than ever. When they were on ground familiar to Johannes, everything was given a description so vivid and minute that not the smallest detail was overlooked. When the way took them to scenes new and unfamiliar, the father knew how to draw so explicit a picture, and give it so vivid an intuition, that after but half an hour of this promenade Johannes was as tired and overwhelmed by his impressions as if he had been out of doors an entire day. He soon learned how to practice his father's magic art for himself. A dramatic representation supplanted the former epic narrative; for they conversed together on the way. When they walked amidst scenes with which Johannes was familiar, they prompted one another faithfully, lest anything should be overlooked; when the way was strange, Johannes trusted his fancy to combine the elements of his memory into pictures, while his father's all-powerful imagination brought into being every least detail, utilizing every childish wish as an ingredient in the drama. To Johannes it seemed as if he were witnessing, during the course of their conversation, a world coming into being; it was as if his father were the Creator, and he himself a favorite, permitted freely to introduce his own childish fancies into the creative process. For he was never repressed, and his father was never at a loss; every suggestion tendered was made use of, and always to Johannes' complete satisfaction.

"With an all-powerful imagination the father combined an invincible dialectic. And hence when at times the father was engaged in argument with a neighbor, Johannes was all ears; and this so much the more, as everything in these discussions was arranged with ceremonious order and precision. His father never interrupted the opponent, but let him speak through to the end; when he appeared to have finished, he always cautiously asked him if there was anything more he wished to say, before beginning his answer. Johannes had followed the argument with concentrated attention, and was, in his own way, a truly interested participant. There came a pause, and then the father's reply; all was changed in the twinkling of an eye. How it was changed was a mystery to the boy, but his mind was fascinated by the spectacle. The opponent spoke in rebuttal, and Johannes was still more deeply attentive, if possible, than before; he wanted to bear every point in mind. The opponent approached his peroration, and Johannes could almost hear his own heart beat, so impatient was he to hear the outcome of the argument. Then came the father's reply, and in a moment everything was changed. The things that had seemed clear before, suddenly became inexplicable; the things that had seemed certain became doubtful, and their very opposites were made to appear evident.

"What other children possessed in the enchantments of poetry and the surprises of adventure, Johannes had in the calm of a vivid intuition and the swiftly changing perspectives of dialectics. When he became older he had no need to cast his playthings aside, for he had learned to play with that which was to be the serious business of his life; and yet it never lost its allurements. A girl plays with her dolls until at last the doll is transformed into a lover, for a woman's entire life is love. A similar continuity characterized Johannes' life, for his entire life was thought."

In later years Kierkegaard was accustomed to spend days and weeks in practicing on himself different emotional and temperamental states, an exercise which he describes as "a kind of nimble dancing in the service of thought." This making of himself an instrument for the exploration of the passions, by which he attained an extraordinary command of the scale of human feeling, was undoubtedly to a large extent made possible by the strange training of the imagination above described, fantastic as it must seem to all straightforward souls.

A final and decisive paternal influence was that which had its source in the elder Kierkegaard's sombre religiosity. The sternness of the parental discipline, indeed, gave the boy a lofty impression of duty, for he was trained to a strict obedience. Not that he was enmeshed in the web of a multiplicity of petty obligations, but with respect to the few commands that were laid upon him, it was the parental principle that no evasion was to be tolerated. Kierkegaard's large esthetic sensibility thus received a restraining and balancing counterpoise in the form of a strong sense of the value of obedience, of authority, and even of an uncompromising severity. This left a permanent mark upon his thought.

But it was in connection with the teaching of the Christian dogma that the father's influence was most pregnant with significance. The boy heard little at home about the gentle Christmas Child, but so much the more of the suffering and crucified Saviour. These impressions were brought so vividly to bear upon the boy's inner life as to do violence to his personality as a child; and in conjunction with his native melancholy they helped to rob his childhood of its natural heritage of spontaneity and immediacy. "I have never," he says, "enjoyed the happiness of being a child." This "well-meant violence" on the part of his father he later came to regard as a training, unnatural to childhood and youth, but which nevertheless later, when he was mature enough to profit by it, became his most precious spiritual inheritance. But his childhood, he avows, was burdened with impressions "too heavy to bear, even for the old man who laid them upon me." "My father's error, however, was not to be lacking in love, but to forget

the difference between a child and an old man." The misunderstanding, indeed, served to strengthen the bonds of filial piety. "To love one who makes me happy, is, viewed in reflection, an imperfect form of love. To love one who from motives of malevolence makes me unhappy, is virtue. But to love one who makes me unhappy because he loves me, and hence by a misunderstanding, but nevertheless really makes me unhappy, that is a form of love which to my knowledge has never yet been described, a form of love, nevertheless, which when viewed in reflection, is revealed as the normal form of love." The religious discourses of Kierkegaard's authorship were repeatedly dedicated in their successive issues to "my deceased father, Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard, formerly a merchant of this city."

III

When Kierkegaard was twenty-five, his father died. At this time, so he describes himself, his personality was a strangely developed potentiality. Fortunate in the external circumstances of his life, initiated into all kinds of pleasures, equipped with a superfluity of culture, gifted with imagination and the power of dialectic, he was an observer and student of human nature. His spirit was high-strung and proud. That he should ever be defeated in any undertaking seemed to him inconceivable, except that he had no hope ever to be able to overcome his melancholy. In his heart he entertained a lively sympathy for all who suffered oppression and hardship; and his total attitude toward life was thoroughly polemic. He had long entertained the ambition to be able to help others to clearness of thought, especially in connection with the Christian religion, for which he had never lost his respect, although troubled indeed by doubts, in many instances doubts of which he had never even read or heard. The death of his father, however, had caused a revival of the religious impressions of childhood, which he now came to experience in a somewhat idealized and less harsh form.

A passage from the journals, written at the age of twenty-two, reveals the nature of his intellectual orientation. The

entire passage is a sort of stock-taking, a review of his varied interests and ambitions. "My misfortune," he says, "is that I am interested in too many things, and not decisively committed to any one thing, to which I might subordinate everything else." Along with jurisprudence, the theatre, theology, he takes up the claims of natural science as a possible prospective vocation. Distinguishing between the industrious collector of facts and the organizing intellectual genius who succeeds in gaining a view of the whole, he expresses his admiration for the latter. Nevertheless, he concludes that it does not seem possible for him to make natural science his chief concern. The passage continues:

"It has always been the life of reason and freedom which has most interested me, and it has always been my wish that I might solve the mystery of life. The forty years in the wilderness, before I could enter into the promised land of science, appear to me too precious; so much the more, since I have an idea that Nature may also be viewed from another side, without requiring an insight into the secrets of science. In a particular flower I may train myself to see the whole world; or I may listen to the many hints and suggestions which Nature offers with respect to human life.

"Theology would seem to be the sphere to which my interest most clearly inclines me, but my theological studies have hitherto met with the greatest difficulties. Within Christianity itself such great contrasts present themselves as at least to place obstacles in the way of an impartial survey. *Orthodoxy* I have so to speak been brought up in; but as soon as I began to think for myself, the huge Colossus began to tumble. I call it purposely a Colossus, for it has in the main much inner consistency; and in the course of centuries the individual parts of it have been so fused together that it is hard to come to close quarters with them simply as isolated features. There are individual points on which I might be able to reach an agreement with the orthodox doctrine, but these would then have to be regarded as the green sprouts which may sometimes be found growing in the cleft of the barren rock. On the other hand I might possibly be able to discern the errors and perversities present at other points; but the foundation itself I would have to hold for a time *in dubio*. If the foundation were to be changed, the whole would of course have to be viewed in a different light; and so my attention is drawn to *Rationalism*. But Rationalism seems to me to cut a very sorry figure. In so far, indeed, as the Reason consistently follows its own impulses and spirit in the attempt to clear up the relation between God and the world; and in so far as it thus considers man in his deepest and most intimate relationship with God, and hence also comes to take Christianity into account, from its own standpoint, as the religion which for so many centuries has satisfied man's deepest religious need—in so far indeed no objection can be urged against it. But this is not what Rationalism proceeds to do. It takes

its essential coloring from Christianity, and hence stands on an entirely different footing; it is not a system, but a Noah's ark, wherein the clean and the unclean animals lie down side by side. It makes about the same impression on me as the civilian guard we formerly had here in Denmark, beside the Royal Potsdam Guard. It seeks essentially to base itself upon the Scriptures, and sends a legion of scriptural passages before it at every point; but the exposition and development is not itself saturated with this consciousness. The rationalistic theologians behave like Cambyeses, who in campaigning against Egypt sent the sacred fowls and cats before him; but, like the Roman consul, they are quite ready to throw the sacred animals overboard when these refuse to eat. . . .

"What I really need, however, is a clear mind regarding what I ought to do; not so much as to what I ought to know, except in so far as some sort of knowledge precedes all doing. I need to understand my place in life, and to see what call the divine power has for me; I need to discover a Truth which is a Truth for me; I need to find the idea for which I can live and die. For what would it profit me if I discovered some so-called objective truth; if I worked my way through all the philosophical systems, and could pass them in review when necessary; or if I were able to point out the inconsistencies within each particular school of thought; what would it profit me if I were able to develop a theory of the State, to combine scattered facts gathered from many sources into a totality, and thus construe a world in which I did not live, but only held up to the gaze of others; what would it profit me if I could expound the significance of Christianity, and explain many of its particular phenomena, if it had no deeper significance for me and for my life? . . . What I need is the power to live a complete human life, and not merely a life of knowledge; lest I come to base my thought upon something so-called objective, in any case something not my own. I need something that is connected with the deepest root of my existence, something through which I am linked, so to speak, with the divine, and to which I could cling even if the whole world were to fall in ruins about me."

It is in these closing aspirations that the key-note of Kierkegaard's subsequent life and thought is clearly struck.

IV

In September, 1840, Kierkegaard became engaged to Regine Olsen. This young woman of seventeen had an important influence upon his authorship; so important, indeed, that it was Kierkegaard's expressed desire that the entire literature should after his death be dedicated jointly to his father and to her. A graceful and attractive figure, she was a child of joy and sunshine. So complete a contrast did she present to the profound melancholy and many-tongued reflection which was Kierkegaard's own inmost self, that "it was as if Simeon

Stylites had stepped down from his pillar to invite a young lady of beauty and fashion to share his narrow pedestal." (Georg Brandes). Kierkegaard thought it possible and permissible to conceal the symptoms of his own inner unhappiness; he believed it his duty to use for this purpose his native liveliness of wit and whatever acquired virtuosity in concealment he possessed, and so make possible the realization of the projected marriage. "My father was the most melancholy man I have ever known. But he was at his ease and happy the entire day. He needed only to employ an hour at night to drain, like Loki's wife, the cup of his bitterness; this sufficed to make him sound again. For my part, I do not even require as much time as this. Only a moment or two as opportunity offers, and all is well with me once more. From the bitterness of my melancholy I distil a joy, a sympathy, a tenderness of feeling, which surely cannot embitter anyone's life. I will not marry in order to compel another to share the burden of my melancholy. For me, therefore, marriage presents a most difficult problem, an anxious task; but it is also my dearest wish." Such were the ideas with which he entered into the engagement. But the moment he faced the situation at close range, the principle of concealment began to appear untenable, a violation of that spirit of mutual confidence and understanding which he considered fundamental to the marriage-relation. His frail health, concerning which he obtained a physician's unfavorable prognosis; his melancholy, which he looked upon as unconquerable; his penitence for sins of youth — all rose up in protest against him to make impossible the realization of his love in marriage. For a year he wrestled with the problem. In October, 1841, he broke the engagement. The journals are filled with echoes of this experience, and the Kierkegaardian literature is largely built up about it, though it cannot justly be said that the appropriate imaginative transformation of the material is ever neglected. In the journals of 1849, when his former fiancée had been for some years happily married, and at a time when the death of her father had given him a new impulse to reflect upon the relation between them, he reviews the story of the engagement in several parallel

accounts. One of these, under the motto "*Infandum me jubes, Regina, renovare dolorem,*" describes the proposal, the engagement, and the subsequent inner struggles between his conscience and his love. "Inwardly, almost the next day, I saw that I had made a mistake. A penitent such as I was, my *vita antea acta*, my melancholy, these were enough. I suffered indescribably all the time." The year of the engagement falls by this account into five periods, each of which is briefly characterized. In the first, he suffers from his melancholy and his conscience, reproaching himself with having torn her loose from her moorings. In the second, "she gives herself free rein in a boundless self-assurance. At once my melancholy with respect to the engagement disappears, and I breathe freely again. Here is a fault on my side. I should have taken advantage of this period to permit her to break the engagement; it would then have been a triumph for her. But the problem of realizing a marriage was too serious a problem for me, and besides, there was something childish in her presumption." In the third, "she yields herself in complete devotion, and is transfigured into the most lovable creature imaginable." His first difficulty now returns, intensified by the sight of her devotion and by the sense of his own responsibility. In the fourth, he comes to the conclusion that a separation is unavoidable, and writes her the following note, reprinted verbatim in *Stages on the Way of Life*.

"Not too often to experiment with something that must in any event be done, and which, when it is done, will undoubtedly give the needed strength, let it now be done. Above all, forget him who writes this note; forget a man, who, whatever may be his powers, could never make a woman happy.

"In the orient, the sending of a silken noose means death for the recipient; in this case, the return of a ring will undoubtedly mean death for the sender."

She refused, however, to let the matter rest with this decision. "In my absence she comes up to my room and writes me a desperate note, adjuring me, for Christ's sake, and by the memory of my deceased father, not to leave her." The crisis was temporarily postponed. In the meanwhile, Kierkegaard attempted to make himself obnoxious to her, "if possible to sustain her by a deception, and to incite her pride." Two

months later he broke the engagement for the second time, despite her protests and those of her father. The gossip in Copenhagen accused Kierkegaard of experimenting with the affections of his fiancée. He himself went so far as to lend some encouragement to this opinion, thinking it might strengthen her self-assertion and sense of independence. His brother, a few days after the event, threatened to call on the Olsens and show them that Kierkegaard was not a scoundrel. "If you do," was his vehement reply, "I'll put a bullet through your head."

This was the experience which placed Kierkegaard almost at a stroke in the full possession of his esthetic and literary powers. The wealth of feeling which derives from it and centers about it constitutes a rich vein in the Kierkegaardian literature, and is one of its prime claims to distinction. The experience had probed deep. That he should have ventured upon an undertaking which he could not fulfill, and that he had been compelled to sacrifice his honor in the breaking of a solemn pact, stirred his sense of pride and self-feeling profoundly. A passage in *Either—Or* reflects one of the moods in which he reacts on the experience.

"What I need is a voice as penetrating as the eye of a Lynceus, as terrifying as the sigh of a giant, as persistent as a sound of nature, as full of derision as a frosty gust of wind, as malicious as Echo's heartless mockeries, running the gamut from the deepest bass to the most mellifluous soprano, and capable of modulation from the softest whisper to the utmost pitch of raging energy. All this I need in order to relieve my spirit of its burden, and to get expression for what is on my mind, to stir the bowels of my sympathy and wrath."

What the estheticist in *Either—Or* thus desires, Kierkegaard came to possess in the fullest measure; for his unhappy love-affair had made him an imaginative writer of the first rank.

But the experience had, according to his own interpretation of it, also a deeper import. It gave his life its definite and final direction. "When I broke with her," he writes, "my impression was: either sensuality in extremest measure, or else absolute religiosity, and that according to a standard quite different from the clergyman's *mélange*." The latter alternative was at bottom already chosen, prepared for by his father's discipline,

and matured by the very motives operating to bring on the crisis above described. He came to make a beginning in two different places at one and the same time, namely, as a poetic and as a religious nature; such is his own epigrammatic description of the situation. "Because of my previous religious training the fact in question [the broken engagement] took hold of me in a far deeper manner than would otherwise have been possible; it annihilated, to a certain degree, in religious impatience, the 'poet' that had been born within me. The poetic within me therefore became something essentially foreign, something that had merely happened to me; the religious awakening, on the other hand, though not indeed produced by myself, nevertheless came to possess the most intimate relation to myself. That is, in the 'poet' I did not recognize myself in the deepest sense; but rather in the religious awakening." However, the poetic endowment demanded expression. The religious side of his nature, being the deeper self, took it in charge, and made it serve its own purposes. All the while it stood waiting, as it were, for the esthetic productivity to be got through with as soon as possible. The authorship bears the mark of this situation, since it has from the first a double character—esthetic and religious; and during the production of his esthetic writings, Kierkegaard tells us, "the author himself lived in categories that were decisively religious."

V

The number of external influences to which Kierkegaard reacted was considerable. An author may gain a certain degree of originality through mere exclusion, but the individual stamp and coloring so highly characteristic of the Kierkegaardian literature is the consequence rather of an intensiveness in the personal reaction, and of an energetic assimilation of the given influences. What an author is able to write the day after his library has been burned has been suggested as a crucial test of his resourcefulness. Almost every line of Kierkegaard's seems to meet such a condition, so little is it the product of a bookish erudition, and so completely is it the expression of a free creative energy. Nevertheless, many general intellectual influences

reveal themselves in his work, and enter deeply into its form and structure.

As a true son of his native land, his inheritance included the full wealth of Danish culture as expressed in its literature. But of all Danish writers, he appears to owe most to Holberg, the great pioneer of Danish comedy. Holberg's humor is something which Kierkegaard may almost be said to have absorbed *in succum et sanguinem*. The Holberg comedies served him for a veritable language; and the more technical philosophical treatises are replete with references to Holbergian characters and situations, giving substance and mass to the delicate comedy of their fine-spun polemic.

Kierkegaard offers many points of contact with romanticism. The style of the esthetic pseudonyms has an emotional intensity and abandon, a lyrical effervescence, at times an extravagance of feeling and statement verging close upon the limits of the rational. By way of contrast, the religious discourses are written in a style noticeably sober, even, and restrained. The involved literary structure of the pseudonyms, with one author inside another like the compartments of a Chinese box, has also been cited as a romantic trait. More significant, however, is the strong attraction which Kierkegaard felt, in common with most romanticists, for the primitive in folk-lore, ballads and sagas. He made systematic studies of the great representative figures that stand out so strongly for the medieval imagination: a Don Juan, a Faust, The Wandering Jew, a Robin Hood. And he shares with the German romanticists an unbounded admiration for Shakespeare. Of the rich Shakespearian insight he makes liberal use for his own delineation of the passions. Though he may be said to have had a sympathetic appreciation of the German romantic movement, his dissertation, *On the Concept Irony*, reveals him as a severe critic of its aberrations. His attitude was on the whole too objective and analytic for him to be classified as a romanticist.

Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel was that of a student sufficiently docile to absorb the master's teaching, but whose matured criticism just on that account became all the more

dangerously destructive. To Hegel he owes his mastery of a precise and finished philosophical terminology, and Hegel's influence may perhaps also be traced in the frequent reversion to an algebraically abstract style, clashing somewhat strangely with expressions vividly poetic in their concreteness. But undoubtedly the most important and the most intimate influence leaving its mark upon Kierkegaard's work and thought, was the personality of Socrates. His dissertation was an interpretation of Socrates from the point of view of the Socratic irony. This study reveals a sympathetic appreciation of the Athenian sage, and became the point of departure for an increasingly deeper understanding, culminating in the sense of an intimate spiritual kinship. Kierkegaard recognized in his own life-work the fulfilment of an ethical and intellectual task analogous to that which Socrates performed for ancient Greece. This thought received its first expression in the journals immediately after the publication of *Either—Or*.

"There once was a young man, happily gifted as an Alcibiades. He went astray in the world, and in his distress looked about him for a Socrates; but he could not find one among his contemporaries. Then he asked the gods to transform him into a Socrates. And behold, the young man who had been so proud of being an Alcibiades, was so shamed and humbled by the grace the gods had bestowed upon him, that when he had received a gift of which he might well be proud, he felt himself the humblest of all."

Twelve years later, while engaged in the agitation which stirred Denmark so profoundly, he expressed the same thought more emphatically, reading into it a still deeper import.

"The point of view which I have to represent and expound is so absolutely unique, that in the eighteen hundred years of the history of Christendom there is, quite literally, nothing analogous or corresponding to which I might link myself. In this sense also—over against the eighteen hundred years—I stand alone.

"The only analogy I have is Socrates. My task is a Socratic task—to revise the conception of what it means to be a Christian. I do not call myself a Christian (keeping the ideal free) but I can reveal the fact that the others are still less entitled to the name than I am.

"O noble, simple sage of antiquity, the only human being whom I admiringly acknowledge as a thinker: there is but little which tradition has handed down concerning you, true and only martyr of the intellect, equally great as character and as thinker; but that little, how infinitely much! How have I not longed,

living in the midst of these battalions of thinkers that Christendom brings out into the field as Christian thinkers (for otherwise, in the course of the centuries, there have lived in Christendom a few individual thinkers of significance), how have I not longed for one short hour of converse with you!

"Christendom has been sunk into a veritable abyss of sophistry, far worse than that which prevailed when the sophists flourished in Greece. These legions of preachers and Christian docents are all sophists, earning their livelihood—here is the ancient mark of the sophist—by filling with delusions the minds of those who understand nothing, and then making this mass, this number, this human majority, the test and standard of Christianity and truth.

"But I do not call myself a Christian. That this is very embarrassing to the sophists, I understand very well; and I understand, too, that they would much prefer that I should loudly proclaim myself the only true Christian, and I know very well that the attempt has been made, untruthfully, to represent my agitation in this light. But I will not allow myself to be made a fool of. . . . I do not call myself a Christian.

"O Socrates! If you had only loudly proclaimed yourself the wisest man in Greece, the sophists would soon have been able to finish it off with you! No, no, you made yourself ignorant; but at the same time you had the malicious characteristic that you could expose the fact (precisely as being ignorant) that the others had still less knowledge than you, they who did not even know that they were ignorant."

An estimate of Kierkegaard's total significance in these terms it would require a more comprehensive and detailed study of his entire career to motivate. But it may be of interest simply to name a number of individual traits in his personality and his work which have a strong Socratic coloring. Such for example is his talent for conversation, and for establishing a point of contact with all sorts and conditions of men. Such also is his living enthusiasm, wrapped in an objectifying reflection. We note, too, a concentration of interest upon morals, with a corresponding depreciation of the significance of natural science and cosmological speculation; a devotion to the maieutic method and great skill in its exercise; and a tendency to ironical self-isolation. The instrumental subordination of the conceptual apparatus of thought to the ends of the personality, and a consequent high contempt for objective and external results, is also a Socratic trait. And finally, we have in Kierkegaard a concretely polemic attitude toward the currents of contemporary life, expressed in intimate personal contact, and with the assumption of some degree of personal risk and peril.

VI

Kierkegaard was unique in the degree to which his enormous energy of reflection was directed back upon himself. Subsequent criticism has uncovered very few points of view for his interpretation not already suggested either in the literature itself, or in the wealth of comment which the journals afford. In the *Unscientific Postscript*, his pseudonym, Johannes Climacus, reviews the esthetic literature, and assigns to each work its place in relation to his own central thesis. Some years later, after the bulk of the religious literature had appeared, Kierkegaard wrote a literary autobiography to serve for an interpretation of the whole. The latter work, however, was not published during his lifetime, only a brief abstract of it appearing in pamphlet form.

It was Kierkegaard's purpose, so he tells us in the course of this self-criticism, to formulate a definition of what it means to live, and to make this formulation fruitful and suggestive for life, stirring the reader to a degree of self-activity that might help him to find himself. He believed that the age suffered from an over-abundance of knowledge. Life was being made increasingly unreal, since living was being confused with knowledge about life. In this situation it would be superfluous and even harmful merely to increase the store of knowledge already existing, even if it were possible to attain a considerable improvement upon current conceptions; this would only tend to promote the disease it was intended to cure. Kierkegaard therefore resolved systematically to eschew the abstract, objective, didactic, systematic, scientific form, and to choose instead the subjective and incidental form characteristic of a knowledge completely assimilated to the personality. In other words, he presents knowledge-in-use, as distinct from knowledge in the form of potentiality-for-use.

To delineate different standpoints and ideals of life in this way is to present personalities "existing in their thoughts," and thus revealing through self-expression the personal significance of the standpoints they occupy. As a consequence, the esthetic literature is pseudonymous and polyonymous; the different authors are Kierkegaard's creations, but "their words,

their views, and even their prefaces, are their own productions," their standpoints nowhere precisely coinciding with Kierkegaard's own. Being ideal personalities only, they can express themselves "with a disregard for consequences in good and evil limited only by the requirements of an ideal consistency, a freedom that no actual author speaking in his own name could appropriately claim."

The work with which the literature was launched is *Either—Or, a life-fragment*, by *Victor Eremita*, (1843). An ethical view of life is here contrasted with a purely esthetic attitude. There are two authors, an estheticist and an ethicist. Victor Eremita is merely the editor and publisher of the material, which has fallen into his hands by accident. The estheticist is the author of the papers that constitute the first volume, and is designated as A; the ethicist, B, is responsible for the second volume, consisting of letters written to A, couched in terms of friendly admonition. The title of the work suggests that the reader is confronted with a decisive alternative; he is invited to weigh and choose for himself. The style of the first volume is impassioned, and throughout the work, the thoughts presented glow with the warmth of personal appropriation. The alternative presented is thus characterized both in its emotional and in its intellectual significance, and the service rendered to the reader is the Socratic one of formulating the question proposed with the greatest possible clarity and precision.

The estheticist is purposely made the more brilliant of the two authors. His glowing fancy, his hectic eloquence, and his dialectic power, are all devoted to the exploitation of quasi-dialectic power, are all devoted to the exploitation of a quasi-byronic despair. A group of lyrical aphorisms introduces the volume. One of these gives expression to the inner discord of a poet's life, while another has a certain symbolic character, as a hint of Kierkegaard's determination to utilize the comical as a factor in his literary program. I quote them here as typical of the tense eloquence characteristic of the entire volume.

"What is a poet? A poet is an unhappy creature; his heart is torn by secret sufferings, but his lips are so formed that when the cries and the sighs escape them, they create a sound of beautiful music. His fate is comparable to the fate

of the wretched victims of the tyrant Phalaris, who were imprisoned in a brazen bull, and slowly tortured over a low fire. Their cries could not reach the tyrant's ears so as to strike terror into his heart, for they came forth transformed as sweet music. And men crowd about the poet and say: Sing for us soon again. That means: May your heart be tormented by new sufferings, and may your lips continue to be formed as before; for the cries would only disturb our peace, but the music is lively. And the critics come upon the scene and say: Quite correct, so it ought to be; the rules of esthetics have been obeyed. To be sure, a critic resembles a poet by a hair, lacking only the sufferings in his heart and the music on his lips. And that is why I would rather be a swineherd, and be understood by the swine, than be a poet and be misunderstood by men."

"Something wonderful has happened to me. I was carried up into the seventh heaven. There all the gods were assembled together. As a mark of their especial favor I was granted a wish. Said Mercury: Will you have youth, or beauty, or power, or a long life, or the most beautiful of maidens, or some other of the many grand things we have here in the chest? You may choose what you will, but only one thing. For a moment I was at a loss, but quickly recovered myself and addressed the gods as follows: Honorable Contemporaries, I choose always to have the laugh on my side. None of the gods answered me by a single word; on the contrary, they all began to laugh. This I interpreted as a sign that my wish was to be fulfilled, and I perceived that the gods knew how to express themselves with taste; for it would hardly have been suitable to the occasion for them to have answered me solemnly: Your prayer is granted."

The essays which make up the bulk of the volume deal with a variety of topics. There is a criticism of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, which seeks to exhibit this opera as a classical expression for sensuous geniality; an essay on the topic of "Ancient and Modern Tragedy," including a sketch of a modified Antigone; psychological studies of Marie Beaumarchais, Donna Elvira, and Margaret in Goethe's *Faust*; an oration on "The Unhappiest Man"; a criticism of Scribe's comedy, *The First Love*; an essay entitled "The Method of Rotations," describing how one may best escape being bored; and finally, "The Diary of The Seducer," in all respects a most amazing and brilliant production, a study of a reflective Don Juan, a highly complicated esthete who has concentrated himself upon the enjoyment of the feminine in all of its various nuances.

B is a gentleman into whose house the young man who is the author of the preceding papers frequently comes as a welcome visitor. This gives occasion for the two long letters that

make up the second volume; the subjects discussed are those which have been touched upon in conversation between them. Himself married, the ethicist writes in defense of marriage, presenting it as the deepest and most concrete manifestation of life, and hence as essentially fitted to bring out the ethical in its true significance. A second letter discusses "the equilibrium between the esthetic and the ethical in the development of the personality." His ethical formula is: the choice of one's self, a choice by which the absolute distinction between good and evil receives validity for the will. In choosing himself the ethicist also becomes manifest to the world, and enters into the life of the community so as to realize its social tasks. Time is interpreted as an ethical category, since it is the condition which makes a history and a development possible for the personality; the individual thus achieves an ethical continuity. The specifically ethical enthusiasm constitutes the individual's victory over esthetic secrecy, selfish melancholy, illusory passion, and despair. Such a view of life, he asserts, does not destroy the esthetic, but preserves it and ennobles it.

"When I view life from the ethical point of view, I see it in its beauty. Life becomes rich in beauty, and not poor, as it really is for you. I do not have to travel round the globe to find traces of beauty here and there, nor to rove about the streets. I do not have to choose and select, to criticize and reject. To be sure, I am not blessed with as much leisure as you are possessed of; for since I am in the habit of regarding my own life from the standpoint of its beauty, I always have enough to do. But sometimes, when I have an hour free, I take my stand at the window and observe the passers-by; and every human being that I see, I see as having beauty. Let him be ever so insignificant and humble, I can nevertheless see his beauty; for I see him as this particular individual who is at the same time the universal man. He has his concrete task in life; he does not exist for the sake of anyone else, even though he be the humblest of wage-servants; his teleology is self-contained. He realizes his task, he conquers, and I can see his victory. For a brave man does not see spooks, a brave man sees everywhere victorious heroes. It is only the coward who can see no heroes, but only spooks."

At the close of the work is a sermon, the fruit of the meditation of a country parson, a friend of B's. It gives expression to that religious enthusiasm which overcomes the incommensurability existing between the infinite and the finite, removing the obstacles caused by the misunderstanding between God and

man by resolutely braving this misunderstanding out. Its theme is "the happiness to be derived from the thought that as over against God you are always in the wrong." The final word of this sermon has a peculiar significance. The sermon ends, namely, with the epigrammatic proposition that "only the truth which edifies is truth for you." This is a pragmatic principle on a higher level, and serves as a concrete expression for Kierkegaard's ethical individualism. The appeal to edification is not, as might perhaps be imagined, a refuge for vagueness of thought, since Kierkegaard gives the concept of edification itself an elaboration precise and definite.

The ethic thus presented in the second part of *Either—Or* is an ideal ethic. It ignores the possibility of a radical evil. It assumes that the individual may find himself, even in his despair, without breach of continuity with his former self, and without the necessity of a new point of departure. Now this is a view of the matter that Kierkegaard did not at the time hold; but he tells us that he wished to develop the implications of an ideal ethic before taking up the problem of evil. When a man has reached a point in his experience where the ethical ideal exists for him in all its infinitude, then and not before will he be prepared to have his attention called to the fact of the evil will. Here the strictly religious crises begin, for here the individual needs divine assistance.

An immanent ethical doctrine of life necessarily assumes that man finds his individual duty and destiny commensurate with the life of the community. The ethical and the universal are for such a view coincident. In the realization of his ethical task the individual is consequently manifest to all and intelligible to his social environment. The individual neither needs nor experiences any private relationship with the divine, a relation distinguishable, that is to say, from the relationship which he sustains to the community; the community is for him essentially identical with the divine. God is like the horizon of the landscape, or like the point outside the picture which determines its perspective; but God does not enter immediately into life as an individual factor. When the fact of sin is acknowledged, however, the whole situation is changed. An

individual relationship to God becomes a life-necessity, and it is only by a transcendence of the old immediacy, and of the social relationships grounded therein, that the ideal self can be found in its reality. Such a personal relationship between God and the individual is by Kierkegaard identified with the Christian concept of Faith. The clarification of this concept thus becomes the next problem in his literary program. By means of three successive volumes he advances, step by step, to a psychological motivation of faith: *Fear and Trembling, a dialectical lyric by Johannes de Silentio*, (1843); *The Repetition, a psychological experiment, by Constantine Constantius*, (1843); and *Anxiety, a simple descriptive psychological inquiry, with a view to the elucidation of the dogmatic problem of Original Sin, by Vigilius Haufniensis* (1844). The last named was published on the same day as the *Philosophical Chips*, and constitutes, from the point of view of content, a companion volume.

Fear and Trembling uses the story of Abraham's sacrifice of his son. Abraham is not a tragic hero, for he cannot claim, like Jephtah or the Roman consul, a higher ethical justification for his deed. His intention to sacrifice his son has a purely personal motivation, and one which no social ethic can acknowledge; for the highest ethical obligation that his life or the situation reveals is the father's duty of loving his son. Abraham is therefore either a murderer, or a hero of Faith. The detailed exposition elucidates Abraham's situation dialectically and lyrically, bringing out as *problemata* the teleological suspension of the ethical, the assumption of an absolute duty toward God, and the purely private character of Abraham's procedure; thus showing the paradoxical and transcendent character of a relation in which the individual, contrary to all rule, is precisely as an individual, higher than the community. A number of examples of the tragic hero are delineated to form a background for the exposition.

The Repetition attacks essentially the same problem, but modernizes the situation. A young man falls in love; he discovers to his surprise and chagrin that he has become a poet, and cannot fulfill his engagement to marry the young woman who was so unfortunate as to have awakened the poetic pro-

ductivity within him. He struggles with himself for a while, and finally flees the field without leaving any word of explanation behind. His honor has received a blow and his pride is wounded to the quick, but he is not conscious that he could have acted otherwise. In eloquent monologues he voices his despair, and his sense of the bitter injustice that life has visited upon him. In his agony he discovers Job, whose plight seems to fit his case precisely—"if Job is a fictitious character, I hereby assume full responsibility for his words." The story of Job helps him first to give vent to his emotions; later, it suggests the possibility of a solution. Without having any clear idea as to ways and means, and with the probabilities of the case completely against him, he begins to expect a thunder-storm that will clear the air, give him back his honor, and show him that the whole experience is merely a trial. This expectation constitutes his analogy with Abraham, and gives him a resemblance to a believer. The actual resolution of his difficulty comes in a somewhat different form, with the news, namely, that his former fiancée has married another. This liberates him for a poet's career. The experience was transitory. Its result is a religious awakening which does not quite break through, but registers itself in a profound but unutterable religious undertone.

The author of the book, Constantin Constantius, follows the development of the young man's love-affair in the role of a consulting psychologist. He is himself occupied with the problem of a "repetition," which he interprets esthetically, as the problem whether an experience gains or loses in esthetic value by being repeated. He comes to the conclusion, based upon experience, that a satisfactory repetition is altogether impossible, and seeks comfort in a cynical self-limitation. The young man of the love-affair illustrates the same problem, but in the form of a religious experience. He wins a "repetition" as a reintegration of his personality, and as the restoration of his consciousness to its integrity in a higher form. It is in this latter sense that the concept of Repetition becomes the chief subject-matter of the book. The essential purport of this concept is the same as the Christian idea of a "new creature,"

but viewed as if from afar, and with a certain ambiguity, in hints and suggestions, in distant gleams. The alternation between the esthetic and the religious points of view gives occasion for dealing with the category in a variety of moods, mingling jest with earnest; in order, says the author, "that the heretics may not be able to understand me." Repetition is described as "the *interest* of metaphysics, and at the same time the interest upon which metaphysics makes ship-wreck; the solution of every ethical view of life; the *conditio sine qua non* for every dogmatic problem." A psychological characterization of the concept is given in a beautiful passage which I shall here quote *in extenso*.

"Hope is a new garment, starched and stiff and glittering; but it has never yet been worn, and hence one does not know whether it will fit, or how it may become one. Memory is an old garment, and useless, however beautiful; for it has been outgrown. But the repetition is an imperishable garment, fitting closely and tenderly; it neither flutters too loosely about the person nor presses the body too close. Hope is a beautiful girl who slips away through your fingers; memory is a handsome old lady, never quite serving the purpose of the moment; but the repetition is a beloved wife of whom you never tire, for it is only the new that tires. The old never tires, and when the mind is engrossed with the old it is happy. Only he finds a true happiness who refuses to yield to the delusion that the repetition ought to give him something new; for then he will be bored. Hope is a prerogative of youth, and so is memory; but it requires courage to will the repetition. Whoever is content to hope is a coward, and whoever is content to remember is a pleasure-seeker; but whoever has the courage to will the repetition is a man, and the more profoundly he has known how to interpret the repetition to himself, the deeper is his manhood. But whoever fails to comprehend that life is a repetition, and that this constitutes its beauty, condemns himself, and deserves no better fate than that which will eventually befall him, which is: to be lost. For hope is an alluring fruit that fails to satisfy; and memory is a miserable pittance that fails to satisfy; but repetition is the daily bread that not only satisfies but blesses. When a man has circumnavigated the globe, it will appear whether he has the courage to understand that life is a repetition, and the enthusiasm to find his happiness therein. Whoever does not circumnavigate the globe before he begins to live, does not begin to live. Whoever makes the journey, but is overtaken by weariness, shows that he had a poor constitution. But whoever chooses the repetition, lives. He does not run here and there to catch butterflies, like a child; nor does he stand on tiptoe to behold the glories of the world, for he knows them. He does not sit like an old woman at memory's spinning-wheel, but he wends his way through life calmly and quietly, happy in the repetition. And what indeed would life

be, if there were no repetition? Who could wish to be a tablet on which every moment Time writes a new inscription, or a mere memorial of the past? Who could wish to be subject to everything that is new and flighty, and to permit his soul ever and again to be engrossed with an ephemeral pleasure? If God had not willed the repetition, the world would never have come into being; for he would either have permitted his fancy to pursue the easy plans of hope, or recalled it all, and kept it only in the memory. But this he did not do, and therefore the world stands, and stands because it is a repetition. In repetition lies the reality and the earnestness of life. Whoever wills to repeat, proves that his earnestness is full-grown and mature."

In the two volumes above described, Faith is delineated in some of its more abstract and formal characteristics. It is described as it appears in exceptional situations, and with a psychological motivation that falls short of the concrete and decisive back-ground which, according to the Christian teaching, it has for every man in the experience of sin. The advance to a more concrete treatment is made in the last of the above-mentioned volumes, *Anxiety*; and the *Philosophical Chips* occupies itself with the logic of the same situation that *Anxiety* psychologically describes.

In the interval between the *Philosophical Chips* and its continuation, the *Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard produced a new poetico-psychological treatment of the problems already dealt with. This résumé, which seems to have all the lyrical vitality and freshness of his first handling of the subject, is called *Stages on the Way of Life, studies by various authors, collected and published by Hilarius Bookbinder* (1845). The volume is divided into three parts, corresponding to the three spheres of life which Kierkegaard regarded as fundamental, the esthetic, the ethical, and the religious. The first part is a reminiscent reproduction of a banquet-scene, "In vino veritas." Five estheticists discourse on the subject of woman. Their speeches invite comparison with the similar discourses of Plato's Symposium, and neither in beauty of form nor in pregnancy of thought do they suffer by the comparison. The second part of the book deals with marriage and its problems from the standpoint of B, the ethicist of *Either—Or*. To the esthetic proposition put forward in the first part, that the significance of woman culminates in the moment, the ethicist opposes the view that

her beauty grows with the years. The ideal resolution with which marriage begins, and by which it is sustained, is eulogized as constituting the true ideality of human life; and the validity of marriage is defended against attacks from both the esthetic and the religious side. The third part, comprising the bulk of the book, is a 'psychological experiment' by Frater Taciturnus, "Guilty or not Guilty?" This is again the story of an unhappy love-affair and a broken engagement, presented in the form of a diary. The subject of the experiment is equipped at the outset with a high-minded ethico-esthetic view of life, which his experience shatters. In his despair he is made to approach as nearly as possible to the problem of the forgiveness of sin; but without finding rest in a Christian interpretation of himself and his situation. Frater Taciturnus dissects him psychologically, and indicates his idiosyncracies, expounds the tragedy and the comedy of his situation, and points to a view of life, religious in character, and in advance of his own standpoint as a humorist, as being deducible from it all. The sympathetic collision described is brought home to the reader with tremendous force in a beautiful lyrical prose. In Kierkegaard's own view, this book is emotionally the richest of all his writings, but too ideal to become widely popular.

Then came the continuation of the *Philosophical Chips*, with its strange title: *Final Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Chips, a mimic-pathetic-dialectic composition, an existential presentment*, by Johannes Climacus (1846). It discusses briefly the objective approaches to Christianity through biblical criticism, the authority of the Church, philosophical speculation, the evidences of Christianity's historical achievements. It dismisses all these modes of approach as incommensurable with the problem of Christianity, and as tending to subvert its significance. The rest of the book, through five hundred pages of dialectic, humor, pathos, and irony, is devoted to the elucidation of the following subjective problem: "I, Johannes Climacus, born and brought up here in Copenhagen, now thirty years old, assume that there exists for me as well as for a servant-girl or a professor of philosophy, a highest good; I have heard that Christianity conditions its attainment. I ask the question:

how do I enter into relations with Christianity?" The exposition of this personal question develops a philosophy of religion, and incidentally, an analysis of the concepts of Reality and Truth. It is here that Kierkegaard makes up his final accounting with the Hegelian philosophy, and with the interpretations of Christianity which rest on a Hegelian basis. The work is a sustained polemic not only against Hegelianism, but against all system-making in philosophy, taking its stand upon an ethico-dynamic conception of reality, and emphasizing the categories of existence, actuality, life. Over against the subjective thinker, "the Greek philosopher, whose life is an artistic embodiment of his thought," it sets by way of contrast the objective thinker, "the German professor of philosophy, who feels bound to explain everything *a tout prix*," and delivers him over to a comic interpretation.

"We smile at the life of the cloister, and yet no hermit ever lived so unreal a life as is common today, for the hermit did indeed abstract from the whole world, but he did not abstract from himself. We know how to describe the fantastic situation of the cloister, far from the haunts of men, in the solitude of the forests, visible in the pale blue of the distant horizon; but the fantastic situation of pure thought altogether escapes our attention. And yet, the pathetic unreality of the solitary monk is much to be preferred to the comic unreality of the pure thinker; and the passionate forgetfulness of the hermit, which takes the world away from him, is far better than the comical distraction of the world-historic thinker, in which he forgets himself."

The *Unscientific Postscript* is an extraordinary book. Its polemic coloring, and the tremendous power of its dialectic, naturally suggest the simile of the huge battleship, with which it has been compared by Brandes. Its easy conversational tone, its aptness in anecdote and humorous characterization, the playful facility with which it handles the most difficult of abstractions, and its ironical self-depreciation, mark it as embodying a quite novel species of philosophical writing. It is a philosophical introduction to Christianity of a most original kind. It describes "the way from philosophical speculation back to Christianity, from the profundity of philosophical thought to the simplicity of Christian faith, just as the previous esthetic pseudonyms had described the way from the poetic to the religious, from the interesting to the simple." "Whatever

actual significance they may come to have in the world," says Kierkegaard of these works in a personal note affixed to the *Unscientific Postscript*, in which note he acknowledges the authorship of the pseudonyms, "is absolutely not to be found in the making of any new proposal, or in exploiting any unheard-of discovery, or in beginning any new movement, or in taking up any advanced position. Their significance lies in the precise opposite, in the renunciation of all claim to significance, and in merely attempting to read through again, *solo*, at a distance of double reflection, the scriptures of our human individual, existential relations, the old and well-known scripture, handed down to us from the fathers; if possible reading them through again with increased inwardness."

Of the twenty-one religious discourses issued from time to time under his own name, while the above esthetic pseudonyms were being published, all but the last three strike the universal religious note, i.e., they attempt to exhaust the possibilities of edification in the religious sphere without drawing upon any of the conceptions peculiar to Christianity. The last three, however, run parallel to the exposition of the *Chips* and the *Postscript*, and deal in edifying form with the considerations which these works introduce problematically and esthetically. The Kierkegaardian literature has thus far brought its reader merely to the threshold of the Christian view of life, marking the end of the first phase of a most unique literary undertaking.

VII

Despite the isolation which the unremitting labor of his authorship naturally imposed, Kierkegaard managed to keep in closest touch with his contemporaries. Although he received no visitors at home (except such as came to him for assistance, to whom his door was always open) he spent much time on the streets, talking with the acquaintances he chanced to meet, professors at the University, editors of Copenhagen newspapers, politicians and officials, writers and students and men about town, or striking up a conversation with some casual passer-by. In this way he took his recreation of an afternoon, when he did not vary the program by one of his frequent carriage-rides into

the country. He took pains to make himself generally accessible, and the promiscuity of his intercourse was noticeable. This contact with men on the street had a considerable personal significance for him; among other things, it helped to enrich his literary vocabulary. "What you have vainly sought for in books," says Frater Taciturnus, "is suddenly illuminated for you while listening to a servant-girl as she talks with another servant-girl. An expression that you have vainly attempted to torture out of your own head, you hear in passing; a soldier-boy says it, and he does not dream how rich he is." He felt that this mode of life tended to undermine the ideal conception of an aloof greatness which the public might otherwise have formed of him. He notes Shakespeare's testimony, in King Henry IV, to the method by which "a great host of kings and emperors and spiritual dignitaries, jesuits and diplomats and clever people of all kinds" have known how to profit by the illusion of distance, so as to enhance their personal reputation. But he would not adopt this method, preferring to give the situation the stamp of truth. "All the unselfish witnesses for the truth have always been accustomed to mingle much with men; they have never played hide-and-seek with the multitude."

Simultaneously with the completion of the *Postscript*, Kierkegaard ventured upon a step that resulted in placing him in a still more conspicuous position before the Copenhagen public. He became a standing comic figure in the most widely circulated journal of the town, *The Corsair*. This sheet had obtained a considerable ascendancy as a vehicle for ironical, levelling attacks upon well-known men, and was much feared, Kierkegaard thus describes its influence:

"The whole population of Copenhagen had become ironical and witty, especially in proportion as it was ignorant and crude; there was nothing but irony first and irony last. If the matter had not been so serious, if I could bring myself to regard it from a purely esthetic standpoint, I would not wish to deny that it was the most ridiculous phenomenon I had ever witnessed. I believe that it would be necessary to travel far and wide, and even so be favored of fortune, before one could find anything so fundamentally comical. The whole population of a town, all these many thousands, became 'ironical.' They became ironical by the aid of a journal which, again, ironically enough, by the aid of straw men as editors succeeded in striking the dominant note and the tone

struck was—the ironical. I believe it impossible to imagine anything more ridiculous. Irony presupposes a specific intellectual culture which in every generation is very rare—and this chaos of people were ironical! . . .

“But the matter was only too serious. This irony was of course nothing but, in essence, vulgarity; and in spite of a not inconsiderable degree of talent in the man who was its originating force, by passing over into these thousands of people it became, essentially, a mob trait, a trait which is always only too popular. In view of the proportions of the little country, it threatened a complete moral dissolution. One must envisage at close range how no attack is so much feared as that which singles one out as an object of laughter; how even one who would bravely risk death for a stranger, is not far from betraying his own father or mother when the danger is that of being laughed at; for such an attack isolates the victim more than any other, and at no point does it offer him the support of pathos. Frivolity and curiosity and vulgarity grin; the nervous cowardice which itself trembles for fear of such an attack cries that it is nothing; the wretched cowardice which by the use of bribery or good words protects itself cries that it is nothing; and even sympathy says that it is nothing. It is a terrible thing when in a little land idle prattle and vulgar grimaces threaten to constitute public opinion.” (Abbreviated)

The publisher of the sheet in question was a talented young man who was himself an admirer of Kierkegaard, and *The Corsair* had more than once praised the pseudonyms to the skies. Victor Eremita had been pronounced immortal; from a sketch in the journals at the time it appears that Kierkegaard had projected a reply to this pronouncement, asking to be spared the distinction. A little later an opportunity offered itself, apropos of an article published in P. L. Möller’s Literary year-book, *Gaea*, in which Möller had made some irresponsible animadversions upon the third part of *Stages on the Way of Life*, bringing it into connection with the gossip current in Copenhagen about Kierkegaard’s engagement. This gentleman had described himself in the Dictionary of Authors as a regular contributor to *The Corsair*, author of pieces “both lyrical and satirical.” Frater Taciturnus replied to the criticism, taking a very superior tone, and took advantage of the fact just mentioned to add the following remark at the end:

“Now may I soon be put into *The Corsair*. It is pretty hard for an author to be so singled out in Danish literature, that he (assuming that we pseudonyms are one) is the only one who is not vilified in its pages. My own principal, **Hilaris Bookbinder**, has been flattered in *The Corsair*, if my memory serves me right; and Victor Eremita has even had to endure the disgrace of being immor-

talized—in *The Corsair*! And yet, have I not already been there? For *ubi spiritus ibi ecclesia, ubi P. L. Möller ibi The Corsair*. Our literary tramp therefore characteristically winds up his 'Visit to Sorö' with one of these wretched *Corsair*-attacks upon peaceable and respectable men, who in honorable seclusion follow their vocations in the service of the state; excellent men, in many ways deserving well, and in none having made themselves worthy of ridicule."

Nothing daunted by the delicacy of its own situation, *The Corsair* took up the gauntlet flung at it with an attack on Frater Taciturnus, the silent brother, who could not restrain himself, but had to reveal the secrets of *The Corsair*, entrusted to him in confidence. Frater Taciturnus countered with a summary article: "*The dialectical result of a piece of police work.*"

"With respect to a sheet like *The Corsair*, which though read generally and by all sorts of people, has hitherto enjoyed the distinction of being ignored and despised, never answered, absolutely the only thing that could be done in a literary way was for one who had been praised and immortalized in its pages to ask to be vilified, thus expressing the moral literary order of things as reflected in the contrary order which this sheet has done its best to establish. I assume that the procedure adopted has met with success. One can therefore engage vilification at the hands of *The Corsair*, just as one can hire a hurdy-gurdy to make music. . . .

"I can do no more for others than this—to ask to be attacked myself. The fallen cleverness of *The Corsair*, and of its collective secret helpers, the professional tradesmen of wit and vulgarity, ought to be and shall be ignored in our literature, just as in civic life one ignores the public prostitute. . . .

"The way is now open, and as the pseudonyms say, the method is changed. Everyone who is insulted by receiving the praise of this sheet, can, if he happens to learn of the fact, reply, and thus testify to the judgment that decent literature has passed on *The Corsair*. It is to be permitted to pursue its livelihood by way of vilification and attack as much as it likes; but if it dares to praise, it shall meet with this brief reply: 'May I ask to be attacked; it is an unendurable disgrace to be immortalized in *The Corsair*.'"

Kierkegaard did not pursue the polemic further, but *The Corsair* kept up a steady fire of satire and caricature for many months. Kierkegaard was featured as he went about the streets, his umbrella under his arm; the thinness of his legs and the uneven length of his trousers were portrayed as characteristic idiosyncracies, while vanity and pride were described as his besetting sins. It became exceedingly unpleasant for Kierkegaard to show himself on the streets in his accustomed

manner. The mob grinned, boys and hoodlums greeted him with a chorus of nick-names, and passers-by took occasion to inspect his trousers. If he stopped to talk with anyone, it made his interlocutor an object of embarrassing attention. So deep did the campaign sink into the popular consciousness, that during this period and afterward, one might find a nurse attempting to correct a child for faults of dress, by calling it "Sören." Kierkegaard was not insensible, and the journals show how profoundly the experience affected him. As usual, his reflection explored all its various phases in an objectifying and idealizing manner. We have, as a by-product, profound estimates of the press and its influence on public opinion, probing its anonymity and its irresponsibility in relation to characteristic features of modern life. On the other side, the aloofness and indifference which he met in relation to the matter from the side of the higher circles in which it had previously been urged, privately, that something ought to be done about *The Corsair*, but where there was now maintained the most complete silence, leaving Kierkegaard to bear the brunt of the attack alone—this prudent aloofness confirmed Kierkegaard in his view of the mediocrity of the world, and gave a characteristic coloring to the religious literature that followed. In his subsequent description of the religious life, the inner collision, by which a man comes into conflict with himself, a collision which had been the chief burden of his early delineation, began to yield precedence to the external collision, in which a man in the pursuit of his duty comes into conflict with his environment, a conflict whereby the performance of this duty becomes an act of true self-denial. A passage from *The Works of Love* will illustrate this new emphasis, which is characteristic of the second phase of his authorship.

"A self-denial of a merely human scope reasons as follows: Give up your selfish wishes, dreams and plans—and you will be honored and respected and loved as just and wise. It is not difficult to see that this form of self-denial does not reach God, but remains on the worldly plane of a relationship between men. Christian self-denial reasons as follows: Give up your selfish wishes and desires, give up your selfish plans and purposes, become the servant of the good in true disinterestedness of spirit—and prepare to find yourself hated and scorned and derided, just on that account, precisely as if you were a criminal; or rather,

do not merely prepare to find yourself in this situation, for that may be necessary, but choose it of your own free will. For Christian self-denial knows what will happen beforehand, and chooses the consequences voluntarily. Human self-denial rushes into danger without regard for the consequences—but the danger into which it rushes is one in which honor awaits the victor, and the admiration of his fellow-men beckons the daring hero, and urges him on. It is easy to see that this form of self-denial does not reach God, but is delayed on the way, losing itself in the relativities of human life. Christian self-denial also rushes into danger without regard for the consequences; but the danger is one which the environment cannot interpret as yielding any honor to the victor; because the environment is itself blinded, ensnared, guilty. Thus the Christian is confronted by a double danger, for the derision of the spectator awaits the hero whether he wins or loses.”

VIII

A volume of literary criticism, devoted to the interpretation of a Danish novel, and notable for its characterization of the contemporary age as against the background of the revolutionary period, followed close upon the publication of the *Unscientific Postscript*. From the beginning, Kierkegaard's plan had not included a distinctively religious authorship, but rather an introduction to such an authorship. The underlying religious motivation was something he had intended to express by taking a charge as a clergyman in some country parish. But now, influenced partly by the trouble with *The Corsair*, partly by a sense of his own unfitness for an official position, and partly by the acquired momentum of his productive impulse, he determined to devote himself to religious writing, and thus his authorship entered upon its second phase. To the first half of this period belong *Edifying Discourses* (1847), *The Works of Love* (1848), and *Christian Discourses* (1848). Though each religious discourse is complete in itself, the individual themes are logically connected, and the methodical and systematic advance so noticeably characteristic of the esthetic productions, finds its counterpart also here, in a gradual approach to more and more concrete conceptions, and to an increasingly severe judgment of the actual contemporary life in the light of the ideals delineated.

Edifying Discourses deals in a *first* section, with the unity of the ethical ideal,—“that the heart can be clean only when it

has a single aim," and that this singleness of aim is possible only for one who chooses the good, and actual only when he chooses the good in truth; in a *second* section, with the lessons to be learned from the lilies of the field and the birds of the air,—contentment with our common humanity, an appreciation of its glory, and an understanding of its blessedness, which consists in first seeking the kingdom of God; and *thirdly*, with the gospel of suffering, "the happiness to be derived from the thought of following Christ," "how the burden can be light though the sorrow is heavy," "that the school of suffering prepares for eternity," "that it is not the way which is narrow but the narrowness which is the way," "that in relation to God we always suffer as those who are guilty," "that eternity outweighs in its blessedness even the heaviest temporal suffering," and "that the spirit of courage in suffering takes power away from the world, and transforms derision into honor, defeat into victory."

The Works of Love presents the elaboration of a social ethic on the basis of Christianity. It makes no attempt to formulate an ideal organization of society, nor does it so much as even give a suggestion of a hint of any external polity; but it deals profoundly with the attitude of the individual toward his fellowmen. "These are Christian reflections," says the preface, "and therefore not about love, but about the works of love. They concern the works of love, not as if all its works were herein enumerated and described, far from it; not as if the particular works herein described were now described once for all—praise God that this is impossible! For that which in its whole wealth is *essentially* inexhaustible, is also in its least expression *essentially* indescribable, because it is essentially present everywhere in its wholeness, and essentially incapable of being described." The beauty and simplicity of the language, the tender persuasiveness of the idealism, and the universality of its appeal, make this perhaps the most popular of all Kierkegaard's religious writings; it forms a striking contribution to the world's sermonic literature.

Christian Discourses contains in the first part a treatment of the anxieties of the pagan mind, "the anxieties of poverty, of

wealth, of lowliness, of high position, of presumption, of self-torture, of doubt, inconstancy and despair," devoting a discourse to each; second, a series of discourses on the Christian gospel of suffering; third, a number of discourses critical of the prevailing religious situation under the caption: "Thoughts which wound from behind—in order to edify"; and *fourth*, a treatment in sermonic form of the Christian doctrine of the Atonement, seven discourses on the Lord's supper. The following significant motto is attached to the third section: "Christianity needs no defense, and cannot be served by means of any defense—Christianity is always on the offensive. To defend Christianity is the most indefensible of all distortions of it, the most confusing and the most dangerous—it is unconsciously and cunningly to betray it. Christianity is always on the offensive; in Christendom, consequently, it attacks from behind." Here we meet with the first definite anticipation of the attack which Kierkegaard was soon to make upon the open or tacit assumption, current in Christendom, of an established Christian order.

A little esthetic article from Kierkegaard's pen, "The Crisis in the Life of an Actress," saw the light in a Copenhagen journal during the summer of 1848, to serve notice upon the public that his exclusive devotion to religious themes for the past two or three years did not have its ground in an obtuseness to esthetic values. In the spring of the following year there were published anonymously two remarkable theological essays: "Has a man the right to allow himself to be put to death for the Truth?" and "The Difference between a Genius and an Apostle"; the former with an indirect bearing upon the Atonement, and the latter attempting to clear up the Christian concept of Authority.

To the second half of Kierkegaard's religious authorship may be assigned the following volumes: *The Sickness unto Death* (1849); *Practical Introduction to Christianity* (1850); and *For Self-Examination* (1851). In these writings Kierkegaard presents the Christian teaching in its highest ideality, and with a reference to the prevailing state of religion in the Christian world. The ideal is presented sharply and clearly, without

compromise. But the consequent judgment on Christendom is formulated as gently as possible, urging nothing but admissions in the interests of sincerity, "in order that we may learn to take refuge in grace, even with respect to the manner in which we use grace." *The Sickness unto Death* marks the appearance of a new pseudonym, Anti-Climacus. The standard for human life here delineated is so ideal that Kierkegaard did not wish to present it in his own name and character, as if his personal existence embodied it; it was therefore presented in the light of a poetic and imaginative rendering—for the ideal ought at least to be heard—under which Kierkegaard wished to humiliate himself *qua* reader. Too much the poet to be a reformer, he preferred to represent himself as a spy in the service of the ideals, his mission being the Socratic one of detecting and exposing illusions. The journals from these years show the intensity of his feeling about what passes for Christianity in Christendom, his unmeasured contempt for its paltriness and its mediocrity; they disclose also the long-continued self-examination which preceded all these publications, and his anxious fear lest he should assume too high and authoritative a role, and say more than he had a right to utter. The *Practical Introduction*, for example, was written in 1848, but held back from publication for two years, while Kierkegaard was debating in what form it ought to appear, or if it ought to appear at all. It was finally published as by the pseudonym, Anti-Climacus, and the preface virtually appeals to the authorities of the Danish church to make the admission that the religion preached and practiced in the Church was really a modification, several degrees lower than the Christianity of the New Testament. With such a concession publicly made by the highest authority, Kierkegaard felt that the established order could be made to embody a sufficient measure of sincerity and truth, so that it would be unnecessary for him, at least, to make any open attack upon it. No such admission was forthcoming, and Bishop Mynster found means to let Kierkegaard know, indirectly, that he regarded the *Practical Introduction* in the light of a vicious and dangerous exaggeration, not to say distortion, of Christian teaching. But he refused to discuss the

matter with Kierkegaard personally, and publicly maintained silence.

The Sickness unto Death is a psychological study of despair in its various forms, conscious and unconscious. Its point of view is that despair is a universal disease of the spirit, so that every man who has not been cured of it, suffers from it whether he knows it or not. And despair is an imperfect expression for sin; on a higher level of consciousness despair reveals itself as the consciousness of sin. The *Practical Introduction* is perhaps the clearest and most precise exposition of the Christian dogma in its pragmatic significance and meaning for life to be found in any literature. It was published in a form carefully calculated in its bearing upon the concrete contemporary situation in Denmark. *For Self-Examination*, two series of discourses, of which the second was not published until after Kierkegaard's death, presents a critical estimate of Lutheran protestantism, acknowledging the significance of Luther's mission as a corrective, but condemning modern protestantism for taking advantage of Luther's one-sidedness to leave out the deeper ethical implications of Christianity, ignoring the requirement of following Christ, and "taking the grace of God in vain."

The ideas which were to play a part in the grandiose agitation that followed some years later, as the climax of Kierkegaard's career, were now laid down in the religious literature as a whole. But as yet they were brought to bear at a distance from the actual situation, in the form of imaginative delineations, suggesting no other requirement to the reader than concession, admission and personal humiliation under the ideal.

IX

From September, 1851, to December, 1854, there was a pause in the steady stream of publications flowing from Kierkegaard's pen ever since the year 1843. His reflection had not become sterile, but its energy was consumed in self-preparation for a new role, one more decisive than any he had yet played, as the journals of the period bear witness. He was engaged in probing the distance between modern life and the ideals which it professes; and particularly, his reflection seized upon the

difference between the life of Christendom and the Christianity of the New Testament. As always, his thought was impassioned, pregnant with indignation and scorn. Financial worries, which had assailed him for some time, helped to mature his personality, and there are indications that Kierkegaard began, during this period, a course of self-discipline by means of ascetic exercises, to replace the somewhat luxurious life he had permitted himself earlier to lead.

Then, in the year 1854, came an opportunity which, in view of his previous publications, appealed to him as a challenge that must be squarely met. In the fall of 1853, Bishop Mynster died. He had been a pulpiteer of great ability, and as bishop he had ruled the church with a strong and conservative hand. Kierkegaard maintained close personal relations with him, Mynster having been his father's pastor. He admired his ability, and had frequently defended him against attacks which he deemed unjustified. But he had not hesitated to let him know where and how far he differed from him. A few weeks after Mynster's death, Professor Martensen (whose *Christian Dogmatics* had so wide a vogue in theological circles at one time) preached a memorial sermon in which the late bishop was eulogized as "one more link in the holy chain of witnesses for the Truth, stretching all the way from the days of the apostles to our own times." This idealization of Bishop Mynster seemed to Kierkegaard an impudent falsification of the Christian ideal, symptomatic of that demoralization to which Christendom as a whole was subject. He wrote at once a brief but emphatic protest. Professor Martensen was a candidate for the vacant bishopric, and hence Kierkegaard postponed publication until the appointment was announced, so as to avoid entanglement with political cross-currents and other irrelevant considerations. Martensen received the appointment, and in December, 1854, the article was published, in the columns of a daily newspaper in Copenhagen. It places in question the truth of the assertion that Bishop Mynster was a witness for the Truth, maintaining that both as regards the content of his preaching and the form of his personal life Bishop Mynster fell far short of the Christian ideal of a witness. It accuses Professor Martensen of *playing*

Christianity, just as children play at being soldiers. This decisive attack upon the ideal legitimation of the established order created a sensation, and naturally awakened a storm of protest. Kierkegaard was accused of attacking the memory of the dead, and of violating the sanctity of the grave; of a lack of earnestness of purpose; of an overweening personal pride; of being insane; and of whatever else the wounded feelings of his antagonists could invent. But Kierkegaard brushed objections and objectors aside, keeping straight to his main theme, and maintaining it with increasing intensity. For four months, publishing altogether a score of articles at irregular intervals, Kierkegaard kept up the agitation in the columns of *Fädrelandet*. It quickly became clear that here was no attack upon the reputation of Bishop Mynster, as that phrase would be ordinarily understood, but that Denmark was confronted with a most searching critique of the whole established order which Bishop Mynster represented.

"If Bishop Mynster is a witness for the Truth, then every clergyman in the country, as even the blindest can see, is also a witness for the Truth. . . . What we call being a clergyman, priest, or bishop, is a means of livelihood, just like every other in the community; and a means of livelihood carried on, if you please, within a community where all call themselves Christians, where there is therefore not the slightest danger connected with the preaching of the Christian doctrine, but where on the contrary this situation in life must be regarded as one of the most respected and attractive. Now I ask: Is there the slightest resemblance between these clergymen, priests, bishops, and what Christ calls his witnesses? Or is it not ridiculous to call such clergymen, priests, bishops, 'witnesses' in the sense of the New Testament—as ridiculous as to call field maneuvers in time of peace, war?

"But Bishop Martensen persists in calling them witnesses, witnesses for the Truth. If the clergy understood their own interests in the matter, they would without delay petition the Bishop to give up this terminology, which puts the whole profession, to say the least, in a ridiculous light. For I know several most respectable and able, very able, clergymen; but I venture to say that in the whole kingdom there is not one, who when viewed in the light of a witness for the Truth does not present a comic figure."

With rapid strides and bold strokes Kierkegaard advanced to the position that the notion of a Christian people or nation is an illusion, that a Christianity with official sanction and authority is directly contrary to the teaching of Christ, that

protestantism in general is a sily dishonest perversion of Christianity, and that New Testament Christianity is so completely non-existent in modern states that it is nonsense even to talk of a reformation, there being nothing to reform. In two separately published leaflets the situation was intensified almost to the breaking point. "Whoever you are, my friend, and whatever your life may be, by refusing any longer to take part (if you have hitherto done so) in the public worship as it is now conducted, with the pretense of being the New Testament Christianity, you will have one less crime, and a heavy one, upon your conscience; for you will no longer take part in making a mockery of God." . . . And shortly after this pronouncement, he sharply called the attention of the public to the fact that the clergy were bound by oath to the New Testament; and then went on to apply the words of Christ in Matthew 23:29-33 and Luke 11:47-48, without reservation, to an official Christianity of every description, and particularly that of the Danish church.

The last week in May, Kierkegaard began the publication of a pamphlet called *The Moment*, of which altogether nine numbers appeared up to the end of September. A tenth number was made ready for publication, but its appearance was delayed by Kierkegaard's last illness, so that it came to be published posthumously. In these stirring pamphlets the agitation is carried on to its last consequences, and the measure of the distance between the Christian ideal and the actual life of the Christian world, is taken with a certainty and an accuracy that leaves no illusion unexposed. "He was a great agitator," says Brandes. "His soul was full to the brim with a living indignation; he had the language completely in his power; by his religious writings he had trained himself to speak the plain man's tongue; and his quiver was full of the sharpest arrows of wit. He was just the man to carry on an agitation of which the nineteenth century will scarcely see the equal. He united the personal weight of a La Salle to the eloquence of an O'Connell and the biting scorn of a Dean Swift. It is impossible to describe his procedure. One must see how he chisels his scorn into linguistic form, and hammers the word until it shapes

itself into the greatest possible, the bloodiest injury—without for a moment ceasing to be the vehicle of an idea.”

His purpose was ideal. He had no finite end in view, no proposal of a changed organization, no displacement of authorities, no derogation of persons, nothing but a clarification of consciousness in the direction of greater honesty and sincerity. For those who wondered what his motive might be, he replied: “I want honesty. I do not represent Christian severity as over against Christian mildness; by no means. I represent neither severity nor mildness, I stand for human honesty. . . . And if the human race or my contemporaries wish honestly, sincerely, frankly, openly, to rebel against Christianity, and to say to God, ‘We cannot and will not subject ourselves to this power,’—well and good; provided this be done openly, frankly and sincerely, then, however strange it may seem for me to say this, I am with them; for I want honesty.”

In October, 1855, he fell in a faint on the street, and was taken to a hospital. In the notes of the young interne who kept an account of the case, there are incorporated certain expressions to which Kierkegaard gave utterance. The following is from the first day’s journal: “He considers his disease mortal. His death is necessary to the cause he has used all his spiritual and intellectual powers to further, the cause for which alone he has lived, and which he considers himself especially called and fitted to serve; whence the great intellectual powers with which he has been endowed, in connection with so frail a body. If he were to live, he would have to continue his religious agitation. But people would soon tire of it; if he dies, on the other hand, the strength of his cause will be maintained, and as he thinks, its victory.” On the 11th of November he died, forty-two years and six months old. It appeals as a fitting poetic symbolism that the patrimony which had made his untiring literary labors possible should have been found just exhausted at the time of his death.

X

It would be interesting to speculate upon the reputation that Kierkegaard might have attained, and the extent of the

influence he might have exerted, if he had written in one of the major European languages, instead of in the tongue of one of the smallest countries in the world. An idealism more powerful and more consistent than that of either Emerson or Carlyle, a democratic individualism as thorough-going as the aristocratic individualism of Nietzsche, and presented with an equally passionate intensity, an ethical voluntarism clothed in a literary form as persuasive as that of Schopenhauer's philosophy, and a species of pragmatism more carefully and thoroughly worked out than that of either James or Bergson—these qualities must have attracted world-wide attention. And yet, he himself believed that the limitations under which he was compelled to labor, and the consequent lack of any effective opposition from the outside, was a necessary factor in the peculiar development of his personality, and one demanded by his peculiar task. Had he written in English or in German there would have naturally been enough significant opposition to have consumed a great part of his energy in external polemic. As it was, the outward opposition was negligible; he was compelled to set his own standard and to be his own critic. His reflection was thus turned inward in a greater measure than would otherwise have been possible; this he regarded as essential for the kind of literature it was his mission to produce. This literature will always remain in one sense a luxury; it does not have the kind of one-sidedness which would adapt it for the foundation of a school or the promotion of a movement. Nevertheless, it is bound to have an enduring significance, for it "delineates the essential thought-determinations of life, and of individual existence, in a manner more dialectically precise and more emotionally primitive than anything comparable to be found in any modern literature."

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